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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000964

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PRO-KURDISH DTP LEADER AHMET TURK  
CRITICIZES PKK, THEN TRIES TO RETRACT STATEMENT

REF: ANKARA 59

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

1.(C) Summary: In remarks carried May 15 on the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK's) website, Democratic Society Party (DTP) Deputy Group Chairman Ahmet Turk reportedly said the terrorist PKK's armed struggle harms the Kurdish people and strengthens the hands of Turkey's military. Turkish press zeroed in on the forward-leaning statement from a senior member of the pro-Kurdish party believed by many to be linked to the PKK. Turk subsequently denied the remark, demonstrating the difficulty moderate DTPers face looking for solutions to Turkey's Kurdish problem outside the PKK's strict party line. End summary.

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DTP's Turk Calls PKK's Armed Struggle "Damaging"  
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2.(U) On May 15, PUK's website "Pukmedia" posted an interview with DTP leader Ahmet Turk in which Turk questioned the utility of the PKK's armed struggle in Turkey. Turk, in Iraq for meetings with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), began the interview with several routine DTP talking points: Turkey's Kurds' high hopes following President Abdullah Gul August election have evaporated; AKP failed to recognize the deep-rooted social causes of the Turkey's Kurdish issue, viewing the Southeast's problems as purely economic; military operations alone will never solve the Kurdish conflict.

3.(U) Lamenting the current state of affairs, Turk pledged that if the Turkish government "introduces a political solution and project and the PKK does not stop fighting, we will oppose the PKK." Turk then adopted a more forward-leaning position uncharacteristic of a senior DTP member, stating the PKK's armed struggle is damaging the Kurdish people and strengthening the hand of the Turkish military. "I am telling you openly and clearly, PKK's armed struggle damages the Turkish people. It strengthens the hand of the military. But they (Kurds) want a project to be prepared that will solve this problem. Since none exists and no peaceful steps are taken, we cannot be effective. If we insist on this issue, then we will be cut off from our people."

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Turk Backtracks Following Media Coverage  
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4.(U) Most Turkish papers were quick to pick up Turk's remarks. On May 16 "Hurriyet" carried its version of Turk's remarks on its front page: "The armed struggle waged by the PKK harms the interest of the Kurdish people and strengthens the position of the Turkish military."

5.(U) Following the press coverage, Turk issued a statement on Pukmedia denying he had said anything to the effect that the PKK's armed struggle harms Kurds. He noted Iraqi President Talabani told him the Kurdish issue should be solved through non-violence, and Turk responded that DTP was attempting to end the violence. Turk claimed he had never mentioned the PKK. He later issued a written statement claiming his remarks had been misinterpreted and stating that the DTP has long opposed violent struggle because it harms both Turks and Kurds.

6.(U) DTP officials also denied Turk made any statement about the PKK's armed struggle harming the Kurds. DTP Vice Chairman Mustafa Sarikaya told the press, "This is not our party view; we believe there is a mistake. We are saying that no one favors violence." DTP Vice Chairman Kamran Yuksek said, "We have been with Mr. Turk since the beginning of the trip. He did not make such a statement." Yuksek maintained Turk merely talked about getting to the root causes of the problems in a way that would allow the PKK to lay down arms and be integrated into Turkish political life.

7.(U) AKP officials responded positively to reports of Turk's statements. After a meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan, AKP Deputy Chairman Necati Cetinkaya told reporters: "We have been hearing such statements for quite some time now and I think it is a very positive approach, which would hopefully help end the problem."

18. (C) Comment: Ahmet Turk's comments were both surprising and important, even coming from a DTP leader known for his moderate and pragmatic views. The context is key (as is the PUK media source) -- a meeting in Iraq with Iraqi President Talabani who, together with KRG President Barzani, appears from this side of the Turkish-Iraqi border to be intent on improving relations with Turkey and overcoming the impression they support the PKK. During the same trip, Barzani declined to meet with Turk on the pretext of a "full schedule." Turk's subsequent denial is less surprising, if unfortunate, in view of DTP's ties to the PKK and the PKK's record of retaliating against Kurdish activists who dare oppose its policies. "Hurriyet" columnist Oktay Eski named three Kurds who were killed allegedly for voicing opposition to the PKK. Turk is not alone within the party in wanting to distance DTP from the PKK, and may have actually taken a calculated risk, knowing his DTP leadership star is already on the wane. (Turk was skipped over at the last DTP party congress in favor of a firebrand -- now doing belated military serve -- and his health is not good.) How damaging his remarks are to his intra-party support will become evident at DTP's June convention. End comment.

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